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AN ADDRESS,

A Soldier's Recollection of Abraham Lincoln,

By JAMES S. BOTSFORD.

Delivered to the Kansas City Old Men's Association,
February 22, 1904.



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The first time I saw Abraham Lincoln was in the early part of August, 1861. I had left school in the preceding spring, and enlisted as a private soldier in the Fifth Wisconsin Infantry. That regiment departed from the Capital of my native state the second day after the first battle of Bull Run, and, after stopping a few days at Harrisburg and then a few days at Baltimore, we reached Washington City in the first week of August, 1861. The regiment camped in the then open block across the street from Willard's Hotel; and, after we were fairly located in our new camp, two or three of my comrades joined me in a visit to the White House to see the President. On reaching the front door of the White House, we were informed by the guard that the President would be down in a few minutes to review the Excelsior Brigade from New York, which was commanded by General Daniel E. Sickels. We sat down in front of the White House, and in a few minutes we heard the bands of General Sickles' brigade coming up Pennsylvania Avenue, and presently they turned around the Treasury Department and came in the east gate of the White House grounds. As the brigade, headed by General Sickels, entered the east gate, President Lincoln appeared at the front door of the White House, and came out on the

steps to review the brigade as it passed by. Mr. Lincoln wore a plug hat, such as was worn in those days,—not a “bell-crown,” but a straight stove-pipe, a linen duster, coming down below his knees,—a garment which was then much worn, a turned-down collar, with a black cravat,—and a low vest. On one side of President Lincoln, as he reviewed that brigade, stood General Winfield Scott, the then General-in-Chief and Commander of the American Army. General Scott was dressed in his full regimentals, with epaulets on his shoulders,—and a heavy chapeau on his head. This was on a hot day in August, when the thermometer was about 100 in the shade. On the other side of President Lincoln stood Secretary Seward. The brigade of General Sickels was made up of officers and men who had served in the New York militia and their drill was excellent. Each general officer was introduced and gave a soldier’s salute to the President. That salute, as every old soldier well knows, is made by a movement of the right hand to the forehead, and then by dropping the arm to the side. Mr. Lincoln endeavored to respond to these several salutes as they were given, but his response was not a very soldierly salute. His salute was a sort of a circular movement of the hand, around until it dropped again at his side. The reception given by President Lincoln, General Scott and Secretary Seward to this brigade of troops, which afterwards became so famous in the Army of the Potomac, was generous and warm-hearted. The difference in dress between the President and the General-in-Chief of the army, and the proficiency in drill of the officers and privates in that brigade, contributed to make the scene a memorable one.

✓ The next time I saw Mr. Lincoln was in the following September. We had marched across the Potomac into Virginia, and were camped about a mile northwest of Chain Bridge, just above Old Georgetown. Our regi-

ment had received the post of honor in the brigade commanded by General Hancock. The second brigade in our division was composed of five regiments from the State of Vermont. In one of those regiments was a soldier by the name of Scott, who one night went to sleep on his post while on the picket guard, and who was afterwards court-martialed and sentenced to be shot. His family and kindred and friends in Vermont interceded with President Lincoln in his behalf, and the result was that the President commuted his sentence to a reprimand in front of his regiment. This commutation, however, did not reach the division until the day before the execution was to take place. On the day before the execution was to take place, our brigade and the Vermonters were engaged in building forts; and our immediate command was engaged in building Fort Marcy, which stood on the side of the pike going north from Chain Bridge to Drainsville, Virginia. While we were thus engaged in building that fort, there came up during the afternoon from Chain Bridge a carriage, and as the carriage approached the fort that we were building it was seen that in it were President Lincoln and his Private Secretary. President Lincoln had come out with the commutation for young Scott. ✓ Many of you have doubtless read the story of that young soldier, and his sentence and commutation; and you can appreciate his gratitude to the great Executive, whose heart was such as to always respond so warmly and generously on like occasions. Scott received the reprimand in front of his regiment; but from that day forward until the day of his death, he made a good soldier. He never afterwards slept on his post; but was brave and faithful, and he died in the front of his command at the battle of Lee's Mill, Virginia, April 16, 1862.

The next time I saw President Lincoln was at the review of the Army of the Potomac at Ball's Cross-Road, in Virginia, in November, 1861. General Win-

field Scott had retired from the position of Chief of the Army, and had given place to General George B. McClellan, who was the Commander of the Army of the Potomac. That review was of the entire Army of the Potomac, which then extended on a line commencing about five miles above Georgetown around to Alexandria, Virginia. Ball's Cross-Road, was an open place about six or seven miles immediately in front of Washington; and there the review of that great army was held by President Lincoln, General McClellan and the generals who were then in that army. At that time, on the staff of General McClellan, and who were present at that review, were two French officers, one Prince de Joinville, and the other now known world wide as Count de Paris. Since that conflict, perhaps the best history of it has been written by Count de Paris. That was the most famous review that was held on either side, until the final review of the Eastern and Western armies in Washington City, after the conflict was over. The contrast between President Lincoln and General McClellan was as striking as that between President Lincoln and General Scott. General McClellan was always a well-dressed officer. He was one of the finest looking men I ever saw, on horseback. Nobody could compare with him as a horseman, unless it was our Brigade Commander, General Hancock. Mr. Lincoln did not appear to be a good horseman. There were present in that review the divisions commanded by Generals Sumner, Heintzelman, Franklin, Hooker, Kearney, Smith and McCall, and the other division commanders, who commanded divisions in that army at that time. The scene was one of the most inspiring I ever witnessed. The movements of the divisions, brigades and regiments were as regular as if they had been in the army for years, instead of a few weeks. Perfect order and decorum prevailed throughout that immense host, as it slowly passed by the reviewing stand

and was reviewed by the President and the General-in-Chief of the Army.

The next time I saw Abraham Lincoln was at Harrison's Landing, on the James River. He then again reviewed the Army of the Potomac, in connection with General McClellan. This last review was after the army had gone through the Battles of the Peninsula, commencing in April, 1862, and extending to July, 1862. The battles of Yorktown, Williamsburg, Fair Oaks, Gains Mill, Savage Station, White Oak Swamp and Malvern Hill had been fought; and the army was camped on and near the Harrison plantation, at Harrison Landing, on the James River. On that plantation was born Benjamin Harrison, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence; there was also born on that same plantation the son of that Harrison, namely, William Henry Harrison, who became President of the United States. Virginia is full of historic places; and Harrison Landing, where we had our camp at that time, is one of them. At the time of that review the regiments in the Army of the Potomac had become much depleted from sickness in the Chickohominy Swamps, and from the battles which had taken place. Mr. Lincoln, at the time of that review, seemed greatly depressed. His face was pale, and bloodless. The review of our portion of the army was by moonlight. It was a beautiful night in July, 1862. The light of the moon shone so brightly, that the features of Mr. Lincoln's face and his cast of countenance, as he rode by, were plain to be seen by the soldiers, as they stood at "present arms" to their Commander-in-Chief.

The next time I saw President Lincoln was at Falmouth, across the river from Fredericksburg, Virginia. The army was then again reviewed by President Lincoln, that time in connection with General Hooker, who was then the Commander of the Army. The battle of

Fredricksburg had been fought, and, in a few weeks after this review, occurred the battle of Chancellorsville. There was good cheer in connection with this review. General Hooker, the new Commander of the Army, was known as "Fighting Joe," and good things were expected of him. The place of that review was another one of the historic spots in old Virginia. That review took place about two miles from the old home of George Washington. It is doubtless known to all that the Washington family, some time in the early boyhood of George, moved up from the place where he was born to the farm opposite and a little below Fredricksburg on the Rappahannock River. It is on that farm where some of the historians have told us that George cut down the cherry tree. Some of our men crossed that farm in going across the Rappahannock River, to the first battle of Fredricksburg; and as I have already said, the place where President Lincoln and General Hooker reviewed us in that review was only about two miles from the Washington farm.

This was the last time that I saw President Lincoln, alive. In the fall of 1864, I received a discharge from the army on account of wounds in battle; and I immediately resumed my studies in school. After the assassination of President Lincoln, and when his body was brought to Chicago, I obtained leave of absence from my school and went to Chicago to attend the funeral ceremonies there. President Lincoln's body lay in state for two days in the Court House, in Chicago. It seemed as if everybody who lived in the States of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana, were present in Chicago on that occasion. I have never seen a greater throng of people together. The occasion is one never to be forgotten. The lifetime personal friends and acquaintances of Mr. Lincoln were at that funeral, the men who had known him in the early part of his career, the men who had served with him in the Illinois legisla-

ture, the men who had travelled the circuit with him as a lawyer, and the ex-judges and congressmen who had known him, and the great teeming Northwest were there. Only a few days before the country had received the news of the surrender of Appomattox; but the people were taken down from the high mountain peak of rejoicing to the depths of grief and to the valley of despair. In common with the vast multitude present in Chicago on that occasion I viewed the remains; and it seemed to me as if there was but a shade of difference between the face of Mr. Lincoln in the repose of death, and his face at that review on that beautiful July night, at Harrison's Landing, Virginia. There were many notable things in connection with the funeral, but there was one that impressed my mind deeply. On the wall opposite the remains were posted in large letters a part of the second Inaugural Address of President Lincoln, which he had delivered just a few weeks before his death.

Mr. Blaine, in his *Twenty Years' History*, in speaking of that second Inaugural Address, says: "That the thought and language were as majestic as those of the ancient prophets." And, as I repeat those words which were placed over opposite the remains I am sure that you will see much in them that compares favorably with the poetry of the Psalms and the songs of Isaiah. The words were as follows: "Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayer of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes. Woe unto the world because of offenses, for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh. If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those

offenses which in the providence of God must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the scourge due to those by whom the offense cometh, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him. Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may soon pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsmen two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still must it be said, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in."

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